

A CONCISE
ENGLISH GRAMMAR
FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS



C. E. ECKERSLEY

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A CONCISE ENGLISH GRAMMAR

FOR
FOREIGN STUDENTS

BY
C. E. ECKERSLEY

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PREFACE

IN this book an attempt has been made to give concisely all the essentials of English grammar, and though it is hoped that the English student may profit from its pages, the main purpose in the writer's mind has been to approach the subject from the standpoint of the foreign student learning English. For that reason those parts of grammar, *e.g.* the preposition, in which foreign students find many difficulties, have been given considerably fuller treatment than is usual in a book for English students only. It will be found, too, that the mistakes in the sentences given (in Appendix I) for correction, are such as English students would not generally make, but all the sentences there were actually written by foreign students in my classes, in exercises and compositions, and are therefore practical illustrations of the errors to which the foreign student is naturally prone.

The examination papers in Appendix II are printed by the kind permission of the National Union of Teachers at whose examinations in English for Foreigners they have previously been set.

The nomenclature used is that recommended by the Joint Committee on Grammatical Terminology.

C.E.E.

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INTRODUCTION

What is good English?

Every teacher of English, particularly if he is teaching foreign students, must have been asked the question "What is the correct pronunciation of ——?" or "Is it good grammar to write ——?" and on giving his answer must have been confronted with the reply "But I have heard many Englishmen pronounce it differently" or "But this very eminent novelist breaks that rule; who is finally to decide which is right?" The answer, of course, is "No one." There is no academy or other body in England to determine the correct form. The chief criterion of correctness is established usage. Correctness in spoken English is conformity to the speech usages of the majority of educated people; correctness in written English is conformity to the usages of the best modern writers. The rules of grammar are like the laws of Nature. The laws were not made for Nature to obey, but are simply a few facts which wise men have observed as to the way Nature acts. So the grammarian merely examines the language of the best speakers and writers, and deduces rules from their use of it.

Custom is the basis of these rules, and custom is always changing. Pronunciation changes from generation to generation, words decay and become obsolete, and newcomers thrust their way in; words

acquire new meanings, sentences are constructed on different lines, and even the syntax of the language undergoes modifications.

It often happens that different forms are in use at the same time, differences due to regional or class dialect, though owing to the modern ease of communication and consequent intermingling of people, the spread of popular education, and the hearing of the "Standard English" of the B.B.C., dialect differences tend to disappear.

Again, there is a difference between the language used in writing and that used in speaking. In written composition the words will naturally be chosen with more care and used with greater precision than is possible in rapid familiar conversation, and the sentences will tend to be longer, more elaborately constructed and more conservative in their avoidance of "colloquialisms" and slang. To write as we talk would be slipshod; to talk as we write would sound pedantic and unnatural.

It is the business of the grammarian to observe and record these changes and differences and to decide as far as he can what is the form of language used by the majority of educated speakers and writers, and their usage is his only authority for saying what is "good" and what is "bad" grammar.

CHAPTER I

THE SENTENCE

A GROUP of words which makes complete sense is a **sentence**. The sentence may express a **statement**, *e.g.* "The student is reading the book," or it may ask a **question**, *e.g.* "Where is the master?" or it may give a **command**, *e.g.* "Open your books."

The **Subject** of a sentence is the person or thing about which we make an assertion. The **Predicate** of a sentence is what we say about the subject. *e.g.*

Subject	Predicate
The student	is reading the book.

When the action denoted by a verb does not stop with itself, but passes to some person or thing, the verb is said to be a **transitive** one and the word or words denoting the person or thing concerned is the **Object** of the verb. *e.g.*

The sun rises. (The action stops with itself, there is **no object**.)

The dog bit the **man**. (The action passes from "dog" to "man," **man** is **object** of the sentence.)

A **Simple** sentence is one containing **one** subject and **one** predicate. *e.g.* The bird sings sweetly.

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A **Double** or **Multiple** sentence is one made by two or more co-ordinate parts joined by a conjunction or conjunctions. (*Co-ordinate* means of equal rank.) *e.g.* The student asked a question and the teacher answered it.

A **Subordinate Clause** is that part of a sentence equivalent to a Noun, Adjective, or Adverb. It has a subject and predicate of its own. If it does the work of an adjective it is an **adjective** clause, of a noun it is a **noun** clause, of an adverb it is an **adverb** clause. The clause upon which these others depend is the **Main** clause. *e.g.*

This is the book **that I want**. (Adjective clause.)

He said **that he would help me**. (Noun clause.)

I saw him **when I came in**. (Adverb clause.)

The part of each of these sentences not in darker type is the **main** clause; the other clauses are all **subordinate** ones.

A **Complex** sentence consists of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

A **Phrase** is a collection of words that does not make complete sense, *e.g.* "on the bus," "carrying a dog." A phrase has no verb in it. If these phrases are combined with a verb they would make a sentence, *e.g.* "He **sat** on the bus carrying a dog."

The words of a language are arranged into classes according to the work they do in a sentence. These classes are called the **Parts of Speech**. In English there are eight of them: the noun, the adjective, the adverb, the pronoun, the verb, the preposition, the conjunction and the interjection.

We shall now proceed to examine each of these in detail.

CHAPTER II

THE NOUN

A **noun** is the name of anything, *e.g.* book, desk, teacher, knowledge.

Kinds of Nouns

There are four kinds of noun:

- (a) A **Common** noun, *i.e.* a name common to all objects of the same kind, *e.g.* hat, boy, town.
- (b) A **Proper** noun, *i.e.* the name of a **particular** person, place or thing, *e.g.* Dick, London.
- (c) A **Collective** noun, *i.e.* the name of a number of things regarded as one, *e.g.* crowd, class, army.

Note.—Collective nouns take a singular verb if looked upon as denoting one whole, but a plural verb if looked upon as denoting individuals. For example, if we say “The Government was unanimous” we are plainly thinking of the Government as one body and therefore the singular verb is used. But if we say “The Government are all wandering about like lost sheep” we are regarding the Government as composed of many separate individuals and the verb is therefore plural.

- (d) An **Abstract** noun, *i.e.* the name of a quality or state, *e.g.* whiteness, manhood.

Gender

English, unlike most other languages, regards gender as a grammatical classification of objects according to their sex.

There are four genders:

- (a) **Masculine**, used for all males, *e.g.* man, boy, horse, lion.
- (b) **Feminine**, for all females, *e.g.* woman, girl, mare, lioness.
- (c) **Common**, where the sex cannot be told from the form of the word, *e.g.* friend, cousin, parent.
- (d) **Neuter**, for inanimate objects, *e.g.* table, book.

There are three customary methods of forming the feminine from the masculine:

- (a) By **use of endings**—chiefly “*ess.*”

actor	actress	duke	duchess
Jew	Jewess	marquis	marchioness
master	mistress	tiger	tigress

- (b) By **composition**—usually by prefixing or affixing a word.

man-servant	maid-servant
turkey-cock	turkey-hen
land-lord	land-lady

- (c) By **employing a different word**.

gentleman	lady	bachelor	spinster
husband	wife	bull	cow
monk	nun	horse	mare
king	queen	nephew	niece
boy	girl	sir	madam
earl	countess	uncle	aunt

THE NOUN

Note a few **irregular** forms: executor, executrix; testator, testatrix; hero, heroine.

Number

There are two numbers, **singular** and **plural**. The plural is formed:

- (a) By adding **s** to the singular, *e.g.* boy, boys.
- (b) By adding **es** for words ending in a sibilant or **o**, *e.g.* church, churches; brush, brushes; box, boxes; potato, potatoes.

N.B.—Foreign words ending in **o** merely add **s**, *e.g.* piano, pianos.

- (c) Words ending in **y** preceded by a consonant change **y** to **ies**, *e.g.* lady, ladies, fly, flies.
- (d) Words in **f** or **fe** change to **ves**, *e.g.* leaf, leaves; wife, wives. But note gulfs, safes, reefs.

N.B.—Words in **oof**, **ief**, **rf**, **ff** take **s**, *e.g.* roofs, chiefs, dwarfs, cliffs. Thief, thieves is an exception.

- (e) Some words form the plural by vowel change, *e.g.* man, men; tooth, teeth; goose, geese; foot, feet; mouse, mice; woman, women.
- (f) Three words take **en** or **ren**: ox, oxen; child, children; brother, brothers or brethren.
- (g) Some words **do not change**: sheep; deer; fish (or fishes); heathen; grouse; species; salmon; trout.
- (h) **Words of foreign origin** sometimes retain foreign plurals, *e.g.* crisis, crises; basis, bases; cherub, cherubim; datum; data; erratum, errata; phenomenon, phenomena; terminus, termini; oasis, oases.

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- Note** (1) In compound words the sign of the plural is generally added to the principal word, *e.g.* passers-by; lookers-on; fathers-in-law; courts-martial.
- (2) **Some nouns have two plurals:**
brother: **brothers** (literally), **brethren** (figuratively); genius: **geniuses**, **genii** (magic spirits); index: **indexes**, **indices** (in mathematics); penny: **pennies** (coins), **pence** (value).
- (3) **Some nouns have no plural:**
information, advice, knowledge, furniture, news, progress, etc.
- (4) **Some nouns have no singular:**
scissors, trousers, compasses, alms, billiards, clothes, contents, goods, oats, riches, thanks, wages, people, etc.

Case

Case is the relation in which a noun stands to some other word.

In modern English there are three cases:

- (a) **Nominative.**
- (b) **Objective** (or Accusative for **direct** object; Dative for **indirect** object. See p. 17).
- (c) **Possessive** (or genitive).

The **Nominative** case is used:

- (a) When the word is the **subject** of the sentence, *e.g.* The **boy** did the work. Here "boy" is in the nominative case.
- (b) After the verb **to be**, if the nominative case had been used before the verb, *e.g.* It was **he** who spoke. Here "he" is in the nominative case after the verb "was."